

6-23-2020

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Recommended Citation

(2020) "At the Forefront of Opportunity: DePaul initiates two new programs to invigorate the health sciences," *DePaul Magazine*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 412028 , Article 8.

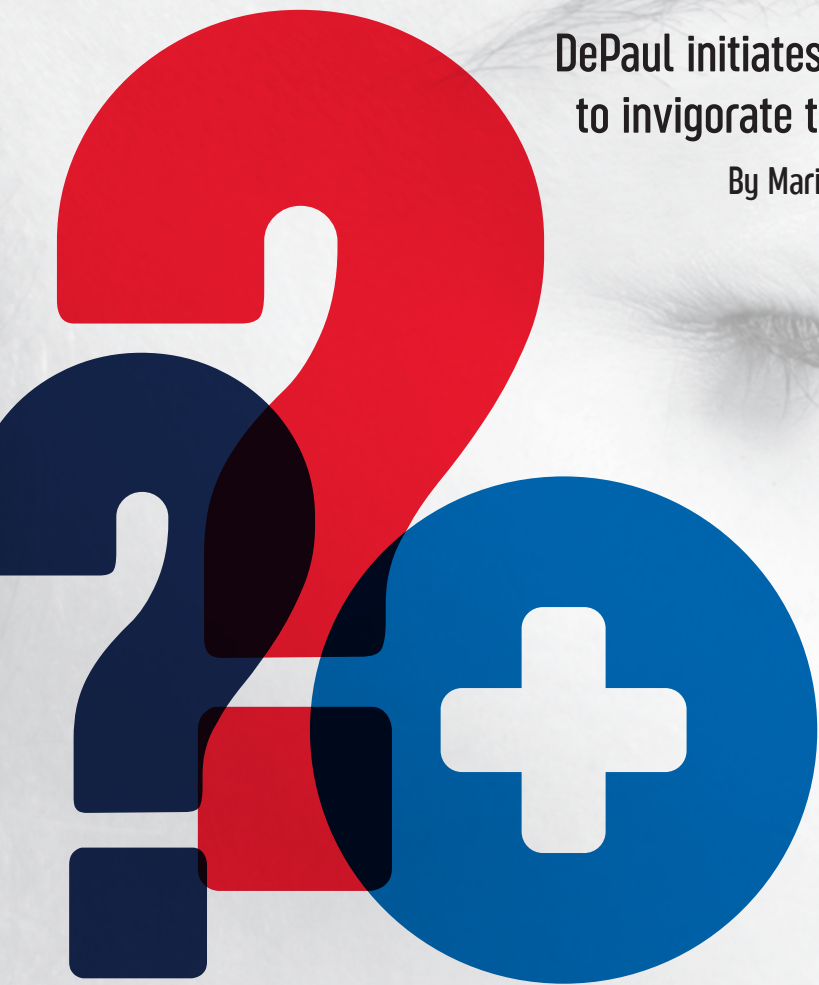
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AT THE FOREFRONT OF OPPORTUNITY

DePaul initiates two new programs
to invigorate the health sciences

By Marilyn Ferdinand



WHO WILL CARE FOR US WHEN WE ARE UNABLE TO CARE FOR OURSELVES?

This vital question is on the minds of many people as aging populations and changes to family support systems will place a heavy burden on health care resources.

It is part of DePaul's mission to help ensure that a robust workforce of well-educated, well-trained health

care professionals will be ready to support these and other needs. Looking ahead at emerging opportunities in health sciences education, DePaul is moving forward with new master's degree programs in speech language pathology (SLP) and occupational therapy (OT).



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**–Jayne Jaskolski, speech
language pathology
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THE HEALTH CARE JOB MARKET

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics has projected employment in health care occupations to grow 14% from 2018 to 2028, adding about 1.9 million new jobs—more jobs than any other occupational group. In 2018, the median annual wage for health care practitioners and technical was \$66,440, nearly 60% higher than that of \$38,640 across all occupations.

Phillip Funk, an associate professor and associate dean for health programs in the College of Science and Health (CSH), says, “As I started looking at demand for health care careers and the needs of students who want to go into those careers, I realized there was a great opportunity here.”

Funk was one of the architects of the college’s Pathways Honors Program, which is allied with Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science and DePaul’s School of Nursing in preparing highly qualified undergraduates to enter health-related graduate programs and professions. “As I worked to build the Pathways program, I started thinking about the larger sweep of programs at DePaul. Even with a great alliance, we still need to do some things on our own,” Funk says. “That is where speech language pathology and occupational therapy come in.”

SPEECH LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY

“I love my field,” says Jayne Jaskolski, an associate professor and director of DePaul’s new SLP program. “Speech language pathology is the most amazing career for our incoming students because we work with clients from birth through end of life. There is a whole gamut of types of disorders we can address, as well as a variety of settings where we can practice. We can work one-on-one with a client, in small groups or in a classroom setting. Working with children versus working with adults is so different and diverse.”

Jaskolski, a 25-year veteran of the field, knows firsthand about the variety SLP offers: “I worked in a school at one point. I’ve worked in a neonatal intensive care unit feeding newborn and premature infants. Then I found my passion working with literacy and thinking about the link between language and literacy.”

SLP professionals assess, diagnose, treat and help to prevent communication and swallowing disorders in children and adults. Their client base may include individuals who stutter, had a brain injury, are deaf or hard of hearing, have Parkinson’s disease or have suffered a stroke. They may also include infants with cleft palates or swallowing problems, or singers with vocal



nodules. Demand for SLP professionals is high. SLP ranked No. 23 on U.S. News & World Reports' "100 Best Jobs of 2019," with virtually nonexistent unemployment rates and a median salary of around \$77,000.

Technologies, including iPads and apps, have been added to the SLP professional's toolkit and will be available to DePaul students. "Right now, iPads are being used for diagnostic and assessment purposes. They can also be used for augmentative and alternative communication for people who can't verbally communicate and for teaching clients to communicate," says Jaskolski.

"We'll also be using iPads for therapy. They could be used for working on articulation therapy, working on sounds, on language," she continues. "For example, with children we might work on producing clusters of sounds in words such as 'st' in *stop* or 'sn' in *snail*." She continues, "We can use iPads to work on language, such as plural words or pronouns, with students. Or they can be used to facilitate nonverbal communication—teaching clients to combine their thoughts, needs and ideas using multiple icons on an app to communicate."

An important goal of SLP is to facilitate communication. No matter the form or method, Jaskolski says, "It's all about communication."

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Most people don't give much thought to many of the activities that make up a typical day—taking a shower, traveling to work, eating dinner and the like. For occupational therapists, these and other tasks that occupy our time are the main focus of their work.

Kate Barrett, director of DePaul's OT program, puts these simple, functional activities in a health care context. "We are recognizing that people experience a sense of belonging, a sense of well-being, a sense of health by engaging in meaningful activities with others," she says. "Occupational therapy is focused on engaging people in meaningful occupations that will contribute to their health."

OT also is a growth field. It was ranked No. 13 on U.S. News & World Reports' 2019 list of the 100 best jobs, with a median salary of more than \$83,000 and an unemployment rate of 0.5%. Variety in this field is also one of its most attractive features.

Occupational therapists work with people across the lifespan, from the NICU through to hospice care. They work in various settings such as schools, hospitals and community organizations. "If we are working in the neonatal intensive care unit, we think about the occupations of those babies," says Barrett. "How are they sleeping? How are they doing with diaper changes and baths? What are the caregivers' routines with the baby? We help facilitate those patterns of activities. We work on positioning the baby for comfort as well as to promote development and function.





**“WHEN I THINK OF EMERGING PRACTICE, I
THINK ABOUT THE ROLE OF OCCUPATIONAL
THERAPY IN THE COMMUNITY, WITH
REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANTS.”**

**—Kate Barrett, occupational therapy
program director**

“We also work throughout hospital floors with patients experiencing various conditions that interfere with their daily living such as an organ transplant, a joint replacement, a stroke, a brain injury, Parkinson’s or multiple sclerosis. We’re thinking about where they are heading when they leave the hospital. Are they going home or to another care facility? What are they going to need to be able to do there? What kind of supports are they going to need when they leave? Do they need adaptive equipment in their kitchen, bedroom or bathroom to function safely? Are they physically able to get around safely and manage their household?”

OT also has an important role to play in preventive care in primary care clinics and other settings. “The occupational therapist might be called in to look at routines and habits that can support things such as compliance with medication, depression prevention or improved safety at home,” Barrett says.

In addition, some OTs are providing support to healthy populations. “When I think of emerging practice,” she says, “I think about the role of occupational therapy outside of the clinic, in the community with refugees and immigrants. I’ve worked with recently arrived refugees who are learning new patterns of daily living around transportation, food preparation, work and other functions.”

INTERPROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

DePaul isn’t just building programs—it is designing those programs to change the way services are delivered.

“What is really opening up right now is the idea of interprofessional education, how we learn about, learn from and work with other health professions,” says Jaskolski. “That’s going to be a big focus of what we’re doing here at DePaul—preparing students in the health professions with the knowledge, skills and

attitudes necessary for collaborative, interprofessional practice.”

Barrett elaborates: “When you ask employers what they want, they say a team player who understands the contribution of other team members and who works collaboratively and effectively within these teams.” For example, a child with cerebral palsy will most likely receive care from a team consisting of an OT, SLP, physical therapist and school teacher. They all need to work together and communicate to develop goals for the child and the child’s caregivers. Well-functioning teams can help reduce the level of confusion and stress for the child and his or her caregivers.

The SLP and OT curricula are developing together to help students understand the role of each specialty in the delivery of care. Both will interface with DePaul’s nursing and psychology programs, as well as the team of professionals working in the DePaul Family and Community Services behavioral health clinic and other DePaul-affiliated programs.

THE COMMUNITY CONNECTION

CSH is playing to the university’s strengths in developing the health care workforce—its strong ties to the community and its diverse student population.

Barrett says of her program, “I think DePaul is so well-situated for occupational therapy because of its strong reputation in the community and because of its strong relationships in a vibrant medical and community setting. With our student body and mission, we really have an opportunity to help diversify the profession.”

Jaskolski echoes these sentiments: “What is most intriguing for me and why I came to DePaul is the diversity of our students and this urban practice environment that is going to fit the mission of DePaul so beautifully.”